



John Muir Correspondence (PDFs)

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1880-11-20

**Letter from J[ohn] M. Vanderbilt to John Muir, 1880 Nov 20.**

John M. Vanderbilt

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Sitka Alaska Nov 20/80.

Dear Mr. Muir:

Your kind letter of the 28<sup>th</sup> ult. is just received per "California" & I hasten to reply. The steamer is behind her regular time, is in a hurry to leave & consequently shortens our time for writing.

I received a letter from your friend Mr. Hanks in reference to that meteoric iron, this mail, & answer same to the effect that the specimen is still at Chilcoot & the only value I have any idea they hold it at, is what you said you thought \$100<sup>00</sup> it may be that they mentioned the price to Mr. Opulm when he saw it but I am not certain that they did - we have not mentioned it recently to them for fear that they would be excited in regard to its value - I will enquire though

this next time & if I can buy it at a reasonable price will do so, if not will wait to hear from Mr. Hanks before paying \$100 for it. Many thanks for your kind attention to the matter.

I am sorry that we have been unable to send the Yellow Cedar logs to Mr. Malpee as we fully expected that we could do this fall but our Indians have disappointed us & although we offered good pay to both the Indians & runners employed here, with promises from them that they would go to work they failed to do so. We will have things arranged differently in the spring & hope to then get the logs. Mr. Opulm is going to San Francisco next month when he will call on Mr. Malpee & explain to that gentleman about the business. We have been having very



severe weather for the past two months, unusually so in the large proportion of rainy days and gales of wind from South east. On the 20th of October this whole section was visited by a frightful cyclone followed by successive shocks of earthquake some of them being severe enough to stop clocks, ring the church bell in Sitka, overturn pictures & other objects hanging and standing in rooms & causing terror both among whites and indians nothing like it was known before, that is so severe. We gathered reports from Yakor to Chalest & Cross Sound, everywhere it was severe, doing considerable damage in the indian settlements & destroying large number of trees.

We had nine hours warning by the action of our barometer & so

took refuge in what we supposed to be a perfect harbor, Fresh Water Bay about ten miles below Point August (Cross Sound) in Chatham Strait we laid there with both anchors down & steam up, when it came it struck us suddenly with terrific force and we were compelled to steam at full speed to keep from being torn from our anchors & dashed on the rocks - our barometer went down to 28.44 At Sitka the bar went to 28.18 - At Chleat many of the indian houses were unroofed, graves & monuments blown or knocked down while the indians were terrified by the rumblings that sounded like the discharge of heavy ordnance. Large tracts of trees were blown down, we received no damage at any of our posts. At Ketchikan a large number of canoes were destroyed, houses blown down and we



indian killed.

I am sorry that Brady has disappointed me with the bracelets & rather that the indian jeweller goes on & neglects his work - he has one of them finished & I am hopeful of being able to send them to you next steamer. Mr. Schulze also has an order with Brady for some.

Our business is very good and prospects for next year very flattering, we are about having constructed here a schooner rigged & so on of about fifty tons to meet an increasing want of carrying capacity.

Some very rich gold quartz has been brought in here from the mainland back of Douglas Island & the country - the gold shows all through the rock which also carries Galena, assays just made here by Pitts goes from \$500<sup>00</sup> to \$6000<sup>00</sup> per ton -

About the same time some men struck the same character of ore at the head of Schuck creek which they have taken to Wrangel, other parties struck some rich pay in places away up to the head of that creek & three other prospecting parties discovered from \$3 to \$6 diggings & they think richer on three different creeks running into the channel back of Douglas Island where the quartz was found - the creeks & flats are extensive & will hold a great many men - As you can imagine there is great excitement here & we have been applied to by more people for passage than we can carry when we leave next week for the Ant country. It seems probable that a rich section of country is to be opened up. The pay is found from salt water to the head of



the Creek and over the mountains on the other side where I understand the rich quartz is.

We are all well - Annie is full of life and just as sweet as she can be. We are in our own rooms & board with the Austin family.

Congy got over the trip all right & brought down with him, the youngest son of old Shat-itch & a niece of the same - The boy he will raise, & the girl is in the "Home".

When will we have the pleasure of seeing you again? We expect to leave in May for Takatut Bay & Mount Saint Elias won't you join us? Congy & Lieut Symonds are going - you can feel assured that I will be happy to see you & have your company - bring your wife with you here & my

wife will be delighted to have her remain with her during our absence and will do all in her power to make her stay here as comfortable & pleasant as she can in Sitka.

My wife joins me in kind regards to yourself & lady sincerely trusting that you will come. Hoping to hear from you I beg to remain

Yours sincerely,  
J. M. Vanderbilt